

WILLIAM M. THOMAS
21ST DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

COMMITTEES
CHAIRMAN, HOUSE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE
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ON HEALTH
MEMBER, WAYS AND MEANS SUBCOMMITTEE
ON TRADE

2208 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-0521
(202) 225-2915



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1473
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
CATHERINE M. ABERNATHY

DISTRICT OFFICES
4100 TRUXTUN AVE. #220
BAKERSFIELD, CA 93309
(805) 327-3811

319 WEST MURRAY AVENUE
VISALIA, CA 93291
(209) 627-8549

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC

The Hon. Bill Thomas
21st Congressional District, California
CAL-FED PROCESS REQUIRES CHANGE
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When the CAL-FED process for working out Bay Delta water supply questions was announced in 1994, California water users hoped it would lead to a successful strategy for handling California's complex water supply issues. Today, water users say the only way the CAL-FED process can succeed is for the federal and state governments to radically restructure its decision-making process.

CAL-FED was supposed to bring water users, government agencies and other stakeholders together to agree to a comprehensive Bay Delta water supply strategy. Everyone recognized that the variety of laws applicable to California water created the potential for chaos. Interested groups could forum shop and find agencies or laws most favorable to their view, even compel issuance of wildly contradictory rules. The CAL-FED process was supposed to bring us all together to deal with the issues in a way that would produce a coherent result, an opportunity for "everyone to get better together". Today, we are no nearer that objective.

Agencies remain free to take differing positions which lead to perpetual impasse. Because the process has been based on requiring consensus agreement, every minority interest has the power to veto proposals. The result of this undisciplined process when combined with out-of-control federal fishery agencies has been to give fish first call on water supplies. It is not clear how the citizens of California are going to be treated. We cannot tell whether water supplies are to be increased or decreased or even how much farmland might be retired. There is little consideration of the costs and benefits of creating new infrastructure for storage.

I agree with water users in Kern and Tulare counties that federal and state executive authorities need to become responsible partners and to provide leadership over this process. Only they can change the negotiation process and end the prospect that a radical minority can veto every proposal it wants. Only they can compel all the stakeholders to work toward meaningful goals for water quality, water supplies, and the environment. The Secretary of Interior and the Governor must lead the CAL-FED process and assume responsibility for seeing that it works. I urge them to do so immediately. The longer they wait to take charge, the more difficult supply issues will become.